

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: **EXECUTIVE HOST**

DATE: JULY 12, 2006

Committee Members Present:

Supervisor Caimano
Supervisor Wm. Thomas
Supervisor Tessier
Supervisor Barody
Mayor Robert Blais, Village of Lake George
Pamela Morin, Group
Tour/Convention Promoter
Elaine Behlmer, on behalf of Leonard Fosbrook, President, Warren County Economic Development Corp.

Members Absent:

Others Present:

Joan Sady, Clerk
Kate Johnson, Tourism Coordinator
Supervisor Kenny
Supervisor Merlino
Supervisor Stec
Scott Sopczyk, Transportation Director of Greater Glens Falls Transit
Thomas LaBelle, Executive Director of NYS Association of Fire Chiefs
Site Solutions Worldwide:
Brigitte Connors
Natalie Whitton
Fort William Henry:
Roberta Daab
Fred Austin
Janice Bartkowski-Fox, Lake George Steamboat Company
Patricia Connor, Lake George Forum
Carlene A. Ramsey, Sr. Legislative Office Specialist

Mr. Caimano called the meeting to order at 10:35 a.m.

Mr. Caimano announced today's meeting was intended as a wrap-up discussion of the 2006 NYS Fire Chiefs' Convention. In addition, he said it may also serve as a potential start for the 2007 convention. As the first item on the agenda, F.I.R.E. 2006, privilege of the floor was extended to Thomas LaBelle, Executive Director of the NYS Association of Fire Chiefs. Mr. LaBelle said he felt the convention had been a "good show" as he acknowledged the good weather conditions. The final statistics from the event were still being compiled, since, he noted, the Association's computer network had recently crashed. So far, he said he could report that 2,414 people had purchased tickets on site; there were 4,000 full-term attendees; with 2,500 exhibitors, for an average attendance of 9,000 people.

Mr. Sopczyk entered the meeting at 10:37 a.m.

Mr. LaBelle observed that a number of fire companies from the most western portion of New York State had sent only 5 or 10 attendees this year. However, by the end of the show, he reported these same companies stated they would send 30-40 attendees,

next year, since they were so impressed with the Lake George area. He said he received similar reports from the fire companies attending from Massachusetts, New Jersey and Delaware.

Mr. Barody entered the meeting at 10:40 a.m.

Mr. LaBelle continued to report he had received a lot of positive feedback on the hospitality and tourism tents. However, he acknowledged the local area had also hosted the Hudson Valley Firemen's Convention on the same weekend, which he said may have taken away some of the Fire Chief's attendance.

Mr. LaBelle noted the Fire Chief's Convention did bring in approximately 5,000 room nights, and a large number had actually bypassed the reservation system through Site Solutions Worldwide. He further mentioned various Lake George business owners had reported an increase in business even though they would have liked even more traffic flow. He pointed out a number of restaurants had run out of food and even the wait staff.

Mr. LaBelle observed that three consistent complaints had been received:

1. Confusion surrounding the parking situation;
2. The tent structures were rather warm, although it was cooler than it was outside;
3. Puddles of water were a slight problem at some of the vendor booths along the Beach Road.

Mr. LaBelle further explained the NYS Fire Chiefs had mis-read the electrical contract and were now faced with a \$30,000 electric bill to be paid. In addition, he said he was aware of only a couple of unpleasant incidents: 1) a particular fire company would not be welcomed back to the Econo Lodge; and 2) the firefighters who went into the fountain at the Fort William Henry had been fined and suspended from their departments.

Following a brief discussion, Mr. Caimano explained Ms. Morin had drafted a Thank You List which would be circulated to all in attendance. He invited all parties to review the list and indicate any changes they would like made.

Moving to the next agenda item, Exhibitors, Mr. LaBelle reported the majority of exhibitors were pleased, since a number of them had recovered their booth fees on the first day of the show.

Brigitte Connors, of Site Solutions Worldwide, commented that she had spoken to each of the exhibitors with regards to their hotel accommodations. She said she wanted to point out some of the motels/hotels lacked some of the amenities people were looking for, such as an ironing board or internet hook-ups.

Mr. LaBelle said he felt the hoteliers needed to realize the "4-night minimum policy" they adhered to was not well received by a number of the attendees. He noted that one visiting fire company experienced the loss of a firefighter during the convention and several members had to return home early. He expressed his disappointment with the hotel owner who imposed the 4-night minimum upon the guests who checked out early to take part in the funeral. In fact, he stated, the hotel owner then refused to accept a credit card payment and required a personal check before the gentlemen were allowed to leave.

Mr. Caimano said lodging comments would be discussed later on in the Agenda. He then proceeded to Structures and said he was very concerned over the finances behind the tent rental fees. In particular, he queried whether or not the NYS Association of Fire Chiefs would be coming forward with any funds to offset Warren County's \$275,000 expense.

Mr. LaBelle explained the final figures were still being tallied, since a lot of fire companies had initially paid by voucher. He said the actual payments may not be received for a month or two. He also pointed out his organization had not expected to pay a \$30,000 electric bill, nor had they expected to provide bus service to hotels in Queensbury and Glens Falls.

Mr. Caimano reminded Mr. LaBelle that when Warren County had initially agreed to provide tents the cost was \$14,000, not the \$275,000 structures it had evolved to. He declared such arrangements cannot be repeated in 2007.

General discussion ensued as various supervisors expressed their disappointment with the lighting inside the tents.

Mr. Austin, representing the Fort William Henry Hotel (Fort), reported the tent crews and electrical firm's staff had been extremely cooperative and very attentive. He also commended the Warren County Department of Public Works' staff who installed the snow fencing on the grounds.

As for the physical location of the tent structures, Mr. Austin explained the Fort would need to have the big tent relocated, from the hotel entrance, over to the Fort's lawn.

Mr. Caimano next turned to the Transportation Item on the Agenda, and he called upon Scott Sopczyk, Transportation Director of Greater Glens Falls Transit. Mr. Sopczyk said, in light of all of the uncertainty going into the Event, he felt the transportation seemed to go very well. He noted he had prepared a brief list of recommendations which he read to the Committee (and a copy is on file with the minutes).

Mr. Sopczyk pointed out the ridership on the charter coaches were somewhat lighter than on the trolleys, particularly on the Sagamore Hotel and Glens Falls runs. He recommended a smaller vehicle could be considered for 2007.

General discussion ensued with regards to pedestrian cross walks, the main entrance to the Fort and the bus stop location.

In summary, Mr. Sopczyk urged the Committee to identify the transportation needs soon. He suggested if the Request for Proposal (RFP) could be sent out in the Fall of 2006, more competitive proposals may be received.

Mr. Barody left the meeting at 11:06 a.m.

Following further discussion regarding the bus stop location, Mr. LaBelle commended Mr. Sopczyk and his staff for doing a superb job with the transportation issues.

Mr. Caimano resumed the Agenda review with regards to Lodging. He extended privilege of the floor to Natalie Whitton of Site Solutions Worldwide. Ms. Whitton began her report by stating the majority of the attendees had been very impressed with the Lake George area. She stated her firm had processed reservations for approximately 5,000 room nights, and a number of visitors had bypassed the formal reservation process.

Ms. Whitton pointed out a number of the guests had opted to stay at the larger motel chains in Saratoga and/or Albany, strictly for the amenities they were accustomed to. However, she noted, many attendees quickly learned the majority of the Lake George hotels had a lot to offer, as well. As for the participating hotels/motels, she stated they had booked reservations with approximately 60 local businesses.

Ms. Connors, of Site Solutions, Worldwide, further reported her staff had personally telephoned each one of the participating hotels/motels to listen to their views on how the event had gone.

Ms. Whitton echoed Mr. LaBelle's earlier comments that many attendees had indicated they would return next year, and bring their family members with them. She noted the opening night was a huge hit, with the fireworks and music; and the collector's glasses were well received.

Ms. Connors noted one criticism she did hear was that some restaurants had very slow service. Mr. LaBelle also stated most of the attendees were accustomed to the business traveler's cancellation policy rather than the 30-day cancellation policy.

Mr. Stec left the meeting at 11:15 a.m.

Following an extensive discussion, Mr. Caimano reported the Lake George Chamber of Commerce had recently gone through a rejuvenation. He said he was confident the Chamber's Director would be eager to work with the Committee in communicating with the hoteliers.

Mr. Tessier stated that he felt the list of participating hotels would grow considerably for the 2007 event. He said Site Solutions' reservations process had proven its effectiveness to the area businesses.

Mr. Caimano said he would now like the other Committee members and Supervisors to offer their observations on the Event.

Mr. Kenny mentioned that his general view of the Convention was that everything had gone very smoothly and he credited Mr. Sopczyk and Mr. Austin for much of the success. He also commended Pam Morin and Kate Johnson of the Tourism Department, for their performance, which he felt went above and beyond the call of duty.

In response to Mr. Kenny's question, Ms. Whitton indicated she would provide him with a geographic breakdown of how many people stated at the various hotels.

Mayor Blais said he would like to echo Mr. Kenny's remarks, especially on Mr. Sopczyk's work throughout the entire event. However, the Mayor said, he felt the area could not view the tent structures as a long range solution in attracting these types of conventions. He said in his opinion, unless an actual building could be secured, the convention business would not be lured to the Lake George area.

Mayor Blais also reported that when he polled 50 different Village merchants, he found an overwhelming number of them were very disappointed with the convention. He explained that very few Village shops felt an increase in business during the convention. He attributed the poor business to the ultra efficient busing of the visitors into the Village for the show and then right back out again.

In addition, Mayor Blais noted the two different firemen's conventions created a lot of confusion for the merchants and hoteliers. He sighted the lack of parking spots as a major inconvenience which kept the visitors from spending their evening hours browsing through the Village. As for the White Cab Company, he reported they were disappointed with the level of business as well. In fact, he said the Cabbies served more firemen from the Hudson Valley Convention than from the Fire Chiefs'.

Mr. Barody re-entered the meeting at 11:25 a.m

In summary, the Mayor re-stated that he felt the convention had been successful for the overall community, yet he was concerned over the related costs being repeated in

future years.

Ms. Sady left the meeting at 11:26 a.m.

General discussion developed with regards to the shuttle services and the lack of parking spaces in the Village.

Mr. Austin pointed out that if the tents were relocated out of the Fort's parking lot, and out of the Beach Road parking lot, at least 500 parking spots would be freed up.

Mr. Caimano acknowledged the Director of Sales for the Lake George Steamboat Company was in attendance today. Privilege of the floor was extended to Janice Bartkowski-Fox, who explained she also served as the Vice-President of the Lake George Chamber of Commerce. She stated the Chamber was very interested in working with the Committee to enhance the services provided by the area businesses. She noted the Chamber had fielded a lot of phone calls from the firemen who were looking for hotels, etc.

Ms. Fox explained the Chamber's new Director, Louisa Craig Sherman, was very interested in putting together a seminar (or conference) for the local "mom and pop" businesses.

Mr. Sopczyk left the meeting at 11:32 a.m.

Mr. Barody encouraged the Chamber in its endeavor to work with area business owners. He mentioned that some of the needed amenities may be relatively inexpensive for the owners to obtain or install.

Mr. Merlino, as one of the area's business owners, reported that his establishment already offered many of the aforementioned amenities. He said this year's event had helped him to learn what he needed to advertise better in the future.

Ms. Whitton commented the area businesses may want to consider advertising in the various firefighter publications.

Mr. Caimano declared that he would like to propose: 1) the Chamber of Commerce be invited to sit on the 2007 Executive Host Committee; and 2) the Tourism Department and Chamber could put together a luncheon to openly discuss the best way to assist the area businesses.

General discussion ensued.

Mr. Caimano explained he would call the next Executive Host Committee meeting in early September to begin the work for the 2007 event.

Mr. LaBelle declared the exhibitors were already anxious to secure their booth for next year. He said he needed a commitment from the County as to how many structures would be available and what type of structures they would be.

As extensive discussion ensued with regards to the absence of sponsors for this year's tent structures.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Patricia Connor, the Manager of Events and Promotions at the Lake George Forum. She explained that the Forum's General Manager, Jason Sherry, had recently submitted a proposal to the Fire Chiefs and the County regarding the use of their building in 2007. She stated the building offered 30,000 square feet and an outdoor structure offered another 20,000 square feet. She queried whether or not the Forum's proposal would be considered.

Mr. LaBelle acknowledged he had received the Forum's proposal just the day before and he had not had the opportunity to review it thoroughly. He said he viewed the tent structures as being similar to renting the "Pepsi Arena." Therefore, he noted, if the County wanted to charge the Fire Chiefs for the use of whatever structure, then he would need to know what that charge would be.

Mr. LaBelle explained the potential sponsors (from Fortune 500 companies) had all indicated their budget processes all required 9 to 10 months advance notice.

Following an extensive discussion, Mr. Caimano announced he would like to hold the next Committee meeting on July 27, 2006, to discuss the type of structures for the 2007 event. *[Subsequent to the meeting it was determined the next Committee meeting would be scheduled for Friday, July 28, 2006.]*

There being no further business to come before the Committee, on motion by Mr. Tessier and seconded by Mr. Barody, Mr. Caimano adjourned the meeting at 11:50 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Carlene A. Ramsey, Sr. Legislative Office Specialist